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SECRET/NOFORN/NOCONTRACT

INR WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS OF DEVELOPMENTS IN HUMAN RIGHTS

No. 23, September 20, 1977

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[redacted]

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Argentina

Videla Tells Officers Rights Abuses are Counterproductive. [redacted] in a [redacted] speech to army officers assigned to the Buenos Aires area,

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President Jorge Videla argued for curbing human rights abuses, not as a means of improving relations with the US, but on the grounds that:

--he, as army commander-in-chief, is determined to fulfill his personal responsibility to prevent repressive acts which impair the government's reputation; and

--terrorists are using repression and the human rights policy of the US to their advantage in propaganda.

Videla also justified the openhanded official treatment accorded recent high-level US visitors by saying that their personal contact with Argentina would undermine the impact of subversive propaganda. At the same time, he assured those present that he would not permit the US to instruct Argentina about how to conduct its affairs.

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INR Comment: Videla recognizes the seriousness of Argentina's human rights problem and the difficulties it creates for relations with the US. His problem is to implement corrective measures in a way which protects him from charges that he has knuckled under to US pressures. His choice of an audience of officers from the Buenos Aires area to hear his strong personal commitment to halt human rights excesses is particularly significant. In recent months, official abuses have been more frequent in the city and province of Buenos Aires than anywhere else in the country, largely because they fall within the jurisictions of two hardline generals, General (ret.) Iberico Saint Jean (provincial governor) and General Carlos Suarez Mason (Commander, Corps I). Videla's clear message was little short of a direct challenge to the security practices tolerated by these two officers. Videla's dispute with military hardliners and his personal style of leadership have dictated slow, cautious actions. Nonetheless, he has increasingly tied his personal fortunes to success in curbing human rights abuses.

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